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IBM plans Lotus SaaS services for New Zealand The arrival of Lotus Live will see some changes in IBM's local channel strategy

By Rob O'Neill, Auckland | Wednesday, 18 February, 2009

IBM is planning to bring its new hosted Lotus Live services to New Zealand, boosted by the acquisition of a Hong-Kong based software-as-a-service company.

Pete Neal, national sales manager for Lotus Software, says a highlight of IBM's Lotusphere conference, held last month in Florida, was the announcement of the on-demand Lotus Live, which signals Lotus' move towards software-as-a-service and the cloud.

As happened with Microsoft's cloud and hosted services, Neal says the arrival of Lotus Live will see some changes in IBM's local channel strategy.

"I see it as an opportunity to open the channel up more than it is," he says. He cites the acquisition of Hong Kong-based Outblaze as bringing such hosted services closer to our region.

In January, IBM announced its intention to acquire the messaging service assets of Outblaze, a provider of online messaging and collaboration services. It said the acquisition would accelerate the delivery of "affordable, web-based email services in a software-as-a-service model".

Outblaze, IBM says in its announcement, was one of the first companies to offer a fully hosted, multilingual email service and supports more than 40 million users.

Neal says one of the strengths of the buy is that the services can be "white-labelled", to allow the channel or customers to apply their own brand to the interface.

"We're planning to bring that to New Zealand," he says, adding its applicable to small and large businesses.

The Outblaze messaging service will become part of Lotus' Project "Bluehouse", IBM's online social networking and collaboration service for business, and currently in open beta. Bluehouse helps people "work together more quickly and easily beyond the boundaries of their organisations", according to IBM. Users can share files, chat, participate in online meetings and network over the web.

Neal says other highlights of the conference included partnership announcements with Salesforce.com, Skype, Linked-in and BlackBerry-maker RIM, among others.

Around a dozen Kiwis winged their way to Lotusphere, held at Disney World in Florida, including people from Lotus services company Crossware and some customers, according to Neal. Customer representatives in attendance included the Salvation Army and a number of banks, he says.

Overall, Neal says, attendance numbers were up 27% and 340 presentations were given. Keynote presentations were spread throughout the five days of the conference.

Neal says he went to see what might be effective in the New Zealand marketplace and

to “get the buzz of what is going on”.

IBM is countering the popular perception that Lotus is in decline, saying it has actually increased the number of customers on the platform. Neal says users are attracted to open standards and what Lotus can do to help reduce costs and boost collaboration.

“These messages resonate from small businesses to large,” he says.

Neal sees a lot of Lotus Domino customers on older versions of the software. He says version 8.5 is a fundamentally different experience from previous editions.

He says a number of “exciting” projects are under way locally involving collaborative technologies such as SameTime, Quicker and social networking, but was unable to reveal customer names.

IBM will bring highlights of Lotusphere to New Zealand at events in Auckland and Wellington in March.

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